



Empowerment of Schedule Caste women in India: An Overview

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to explain the empowerment of Schedule Caste women in India and suggest measures to improve their empowerment position. The paper stressed that in India and other countries in South Asia, people have been systematically discriminated against on the basis of their work a descent for centuries. Over 250 million people are scheduled caste also known as untouchables or outcasts. They experience violence, discrimination and social exclusion on a daily basis. Economic growth in India has been strong over the past decade. However, the caste disparities are increasing, the situation of schedule caste women in India needs special attention. After independence, Scheduled Caste women have some socio, economic and political provisions at some extent. However, it is concluded that they must come on their own accord to develop themselves by attaining will power and confidence which cannot be given by anybody.

Keywords: Economic growth, discrimination, social exclusion, Empowerment, Schedule Caste women

Introduction:

Nowadays, empowerment of Schedule caste women is one of the important issues tackled by India. Women “empowerment” and “women equality with men” is a universal issue. Women empowerment means the creation of an environment for women where they can make decision of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic political and legal strength of the women. They freely live their life with a sense of self-worth respect and dignity. They must have complete control of their life both within and outside of their home and work place. The women should have liberty to make their own choices and decisions. They must have equal rights to participate in social religious and public activities. Similarly they must have equal social status in the society. Though above all are the expectations of women empowerment. But in actual practice a contradictory picture could be seen with the case of women in India especially schedule caste women. The aim of this Article is to explain the Empowerment of Schedule Caste women in India and suggest

measures to improve their empowerment position.

Indian constitution guarantees equality to all section of people but certain sections of society especially schedule caste not able to develop to the expectation. This is more to with the case of “Schedule Caste women in India” where most of them living in miserable conditions. Since the time immemorial schedule caste women have been deprived from certain privileges especially, socially, politically, economically and educationally their position it’s very weak. Meanwhile, in the meantime, some of the schedule caste women are able to move in the process of development. In the words of Andre Beteille - “Instead of dispersed inequalities, we find “caste system” an accumulative inequality where social and political power is concentrated into the hands of the same group. The best proof of descent-based discriminations is that only schedule caste is untouchables”.

Background Information of schedule caste women in India: In India and other countries in South Asia, people have been systematically discriminated against on the basis of their work



a descent for centuries. Over 250 million people are scheduled caste also known as untouchables or outcasts. They experience violence, discrimination and social exclusion on a daily basis. Economic growth in India has been strong over the past decade. However, the caste disparities are increasing, the situation of schedule caste women in India needs special attention. They are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world, and make up 2% of the world's total population. Schedule caste women are discriminated against three times over they are poor, they are women and they are schedule caste women constitute half of the ca.250 million Schedule caste population and 16.3 of the total Indian female population. The traditional taboos are the same for schedule caste men and schedule caste women. However, schedule caste women have to deal with them more often. Schedule caste women are discriminated against not only by people of higher castes, but also with their own communities. Men are dominant in schedule caste communities; schedule caste women have less power within the schedule caste movement itself. Women are active in large numbers in the movement but most leadership positions in the organizations, human rights of schedule caste women.

Now we will examine social political economic and education empowerment of schedule caste women in India.

Social Empowerment

Most of the schedule caste women are living in rural areas. Schedule caste women are socially discriminated from the other high caste people. The gender discrimination starts at the very early stage in life of a schedule caste girl. Normally girl children are retained at home to look after the siblings. Another thing is the compulsory marriage of the girls at very early age after which the education is stopped. Generally in the male dominated society, polygamy is allowed and more so in many schedule caste families. Because of this the

position of the women deteriorated. Joint family system, polygamy, property structure, early marriage and permanent widowhood were hurdles for the development of all women in early marriage and permanent widowhood were hurdles for the development of all women in early period. But in the 20th century after the Mahatma Gandhian movement to educate women, slowly changes occurred in the position of women. But here, rural women were more blessed than urban women because divorce and remarriage were allowed for them. Mainly Sudras (i.e. low caste people) allowed divorce and remarriage for their women. There is the practice of Devadasi system in some of the places of A.P especially in Chittor District this practice is more prevalent. According to this practice the teen age schedule caste girls get married to the god and afterward they will be turned into prostitutes. The governor of Andhra Pradesh Kumudben Joshi tried her level best to put an end to this evil practice and many efforts have been made by several voluntary organizations, but unfortunately it has continued till now.

Political Empowerment:

Political participation of schedule caste women is also very less. Starting from 1st Lok Sabha to 16th Lok Sabha very few schedule caste women were able to make a room for them to participate in politics and involve themselves in decision making process. In first Lok Sabha only one seat were won by schedule caste women namely Margate Chandra sekhar who has given Deputy Health Minister. In the Second Lok Sabha elections three schedule caste women got elected. No schedule caste women were given any port polio. In the third Lok Sabha the number of schedule caste women who got elected increased to four. No schedule caste women were given any port polio. Coming to the fourth Lok Sabha the number of schedule caste women who got elected decreased to three. Unfortunately this time also nobody got opportunity to take part in decision making



process. In the Fifth Lok Sabha schedule caste women were elected. This time also nobody was given ministerial position. Only one schedule caste women were got elected in the sixth Lok Sabha. This time also nobody was given any port polio. In the seventh Lok Sabha four schedule caste women were elected. In this Kamala Kumari got Deputy Minister for women and child welfare. In the Eight Lok Sabha four schedule caste women got elected. This time Margaret Chandrasekhar was given women and social welfare minister with independent charge.

Three schedule caste women were elected in ninth Lok Sabha. Here, also nobody was given ministerial position. In tenth Lok Sabha five schedule caste women were elected. This time kumari sailaja was given Deputy Minister for Education and Cultural wing in Human Resource Department, Margate Chandrasekhar was appointed as a member of the Parliamentary committee. Surprisingly ten schedule caste women were elected in eleventh Lok Sabha. But unfortunately this time also nobody got opportunity to take part in decision making process.

In the Twelfth Lok Sabha twelve schedule caste women were elected. This time also nobody got opportunity to take part in decision making process. Nine schedule caste women were elected in the Thirteen Lok Sabha. This time also nobody was given port polio. Coming to Fourteen Lok Sabha ten schedule caste women were elected. Meira Kumar was given Minister for Social Justice. Sailaja for Urban Development and Panabaka Lakshmi for Health and Family welfare. In the Fifteen Lok Sabha seven schedule caste women were elected. Among them only Panabaka Lakshmi was given Petroleum Minister. In the Sixteen Lok Sabha three schedule caste women were elected. No schedule caste woman was given any port polio in Modi Cabinet.

From the above statistics, it is clear that though the number of schedule caste women participation is increasing, but schedule caste women involvement in the decision-making process has been marginal due to male and other forward caste people. Schedule caste women have also holding important positions like Chief Ministers in the state. Holding Chief Ministership in the real terms of Politics and Administration is a tremendous task of responsibility and leadership. If an opportunity and encouragement is given to schedule caste women they can also do miracles. Unfortunately they are not given proper chance in any of the Cabinet position except Margate Chandrasekhar no schedule caste women was given Cabinet minister rank. 73, 74 constitutions amendments by making a provision 1/3 of reservation seats local bodies to the SC, ST women provide an opportunity to increase their political participation.

Educational Empowerment:

Educationally schedule caste women are slowly in the process of development. In most of the cases, the dropout rates of girls in primary and secondary education is more in this community due to various reasons.

The following are the main reasons:

1. Resistance from the family to send girls to schools.
2. Fear of insecurity in villages.
3. Lack of physical facilities like accommodation, school, transport and medical facilities.
4. The girls were forced to take care of the siblings when the parents are away at work.
5. Girls were forced to do domestic chores which prevent from attending school.
6. Working to earn for the family prevent the girls from attending school.



7. Working with parents to earn their livelihood in beedi factories or other unorganized sector made them illiterate.
8. Because of the sick and unemployed parents girls were forced to work.
9. Many were forced to get married at young age, which stop schooling.
10. Social restriction is that the girls should stop education after marriage.
11. In some areas there are complaints from schedule caste women teachers of misbehaviors, blackmail and exploitation by the male staff of other high caste people.
12. Distance of schools from home.
13. Irrelevant content of the education system.
14. Fear of alienation of girls from their environment as a result of education is some of the other factors for low literacy level among schedule caste girls. Even if the education improved the marriage prospects of the girls, the minus point is the increase in dowry. Therefore many parents wish to withdraw the girls from schools.

The present position seems to be better with reference to the rate of literacy among schedule caste. The literacy rate is 31.48% for boys and 10.93% for girls. Schedule caste women belonging to the creamy layer of the society are better with good education and socially and economically they are well off like other high castes. They are fully aware of the welfare schemes provided by the Government and their percentage is very low when compared with the total schedule caste population. In rural areas, the first generation girls from schedule caste need the attention of Government and other organization.

Higher Education:

The UGC has given reservations for seats in colleges for schedule caste students 25%, schedule tribe 7.5% which is highly beneficial. Also relaxation in marks for 5% is given to schedule caste students in admission. Financial assistance in the form fellowship is given to schedule caste Rs. 8,000/- is given per JRF to continue research studies at University level. Currently, UGC is giving Rs. 30,000/- every month under Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for SC, ST Scholars both men and women for a period of five years. After award of PhD Post-Doctoral Fellowships are also giving to SC, ST Scholars @ Rs. 58,000/- per every month for a period of five years. There is special SC/ST cells at the University to effective implementation of the government orders and improve the condition of University level schedule caste students. Especially schedule castes women are belonging to the creamy layer of the society are better with good education and socially and educationally they are well off like other castes.

Economic Empowerment

Women work equally along with men in schedule caste community 75% of schedule caste women are agricultural laborers and they are the backbone of Indian economy. Though schedule caste women are earn equally along with their husbands, but they are not having economic freedom most of the schedule caste women in urban areas are working in an organized sectors. In municipalities and municipal corporations they are working as scavengers and sweepers. Because of education now the economic position of schedule caste women is somewhat better. Some of the schedule caste women are placing themselves in higher services like IAS and IPS also. They are trying their level best to compete equally along with man in all aspects.

Suggestions to Improve the Empowerment of schedule caste women

*To bring out a comprehensive development policy on schedule caste women, which should



spell out concrete and time-bound strategies and programmes for the socio-economic and political upliftment of schedule caste women.

- Adopting and implementing policies and measures to enable schedule caste women to gain a minimum of five acres of cultivable land, registered in their name.
- Implementing reservations in employment in both the public and private sectors for schedule caste women and specifically target schedule caste women capacitation.
- Take into account in all programs and project planning free education at the formal schooling, technical and professional education levels for schedule caste girls.
- By increasing the educational standards.
- Implement appropriate measures to prevent globalization exacerbating the situation of schedule caste women's unemployment and poverty, including evolving functional and state level perspective plans for mainstreaming schedule caste women into development programmes and market enterprises.
- Evolve a national labor policy for the unorganized sector, especially agricultural labor where the majority of schedule caste women are concentrated, to protect worker's rights.
- To ensure schedule caste women equal access without caste or gender discrimination to healthcare and social security services.
- Ensure the fundamental rights of schedule caste women are protected in all situations and that swift measures are taken to bring justice to schedule caste women whose rights have been violated as per the law.

- Evolve a strategy to appoint a Special Reporter to expose the abhorrent and discriminatory practice of temple prostitution (Devadasi or Jogin) and to recommend adequate social security measure that care of these women's life subsistence.

Conclusion

Schedule caste women are in no way inferior to other caste people. Government is providing many opportunities to improve the social, political, economic and educational conditions of schedule caste women. Finally they must come on their own accord to develop themselves by attaining will power and confidence which cannot be given by anybody.

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